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TROTTER INSTITUTE REVIEW

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INSIDE

- 4 *Affirmative Action: Problems and Prospects*
  James Farmer
- 9 *The Economic Status of Blacks in Boston*
  James E. Blackwell
- 13 *Some Observations on* Closing the Gap: Forty Years of Economic Progress for Blacks
  Jeremiah P. Cotton
- 16 *Reel Blacks*
  Patricia A. Turner
- 18 *Description of William Monroe Trotter Institute*
- 19 *Announcements*

Trotter Institute Review

Editor
Wornie L. Reed

Assistant Editor
Frances Stubbs

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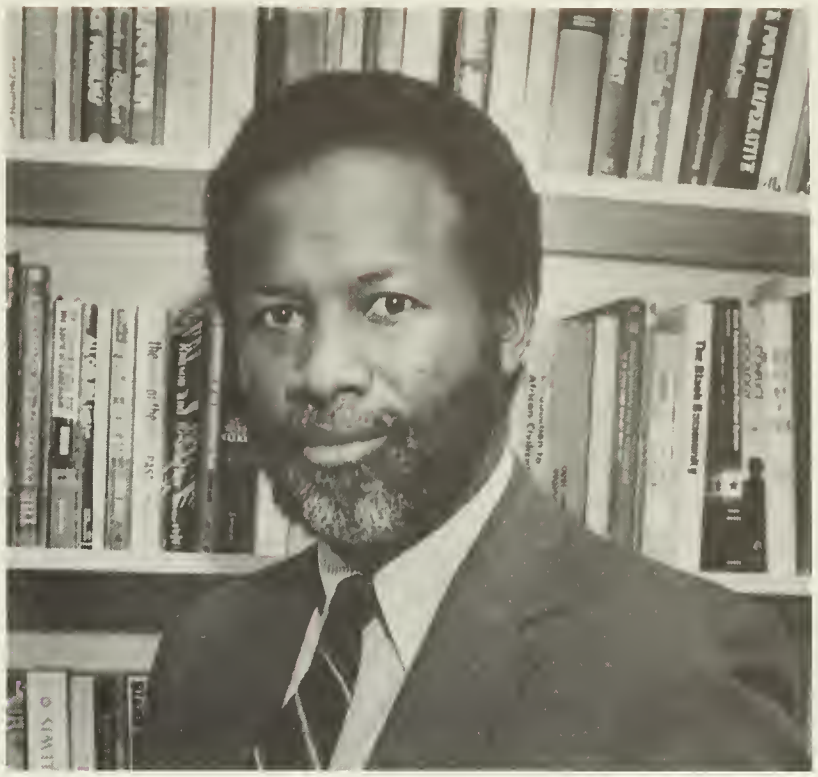
Editor's Notes

by
Wornie L. Reed



This edition of The Trotter Institute Review addresses issues in economics and the entertainment media. Topics include employment, affirmative action, income, and the black experience as presented in movies. The articles address these concerns at what may be a critical point in race relations in the United States. At a time when the national mood suggests that civil rights and economic opportunities have been provided sufficiently to blacks and that nothing further needs to be done, these articles suggest how far we have to go before that is a reality.

Blackwell demonstrates that although the State of Massachusetts has a very low unemployment rate and is experiencing an economic boom, blacks and other minorities are not participating equitably. In fact, although the statewide unemployment rate of Massachusetts is low, unemployment and poverty rates are very high for blacks in Boston, as they are in other major cities in the United States. His study raises serious questions about the validity of the dictum that "a rising tide lifts all boats." The State's economic prosperity has not translated into low unemployment or low poverty rates among blacks in the inner city. Blackwell discusses how barriers may be removed to allow more access by blacks to jobs in the booming construction industry as well as the government and other areas of the private sector.

In spite of supportive Supreme Court rulings, affirmative action is under attack, principally from the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunities Commission. James Farmer, the civil rights leader who was instrumental in influencing President Lyndon Johnson to initiate the affirmative action program in the 1960's, reviews the history of the development of the policy and discusses current issues and implications.

As unemployment and underemployment abound in the black communities of our inner cities, some analysts are continually describing the increasing income of black households, and arguing that blacks are making tremendous gains in income and employment. Economist Jeremiah Cotton critiques one such study which was conducted at the Rand Corporation.

One of the primary arguments advanced through the years for the necessity of having books and courses on black history was that accurate socio-historic data are needed to correct distortions and other inaccuracies about the black experience. In the Fall of 1986, two commercial movies demonstrated the need for such vigilance. These movies have been so loose with their socio-historic content as to provoke protests from groups in the black community. One of these movies, Walt Disney's re-released *Song of the South* (1946), is critiqued here by Patricia Turner.

Another recent film, New World Pictures' *Soul Man* (1986), has been criticized by such groups as the Black Law Students Association at Harvard for ridiculing the black experience. In this film, a white man darkens his face and pretends to be black so that he can receive preferential treatment for admission to law school. This film is seen as ridiculing the objectives of affirmative action and ignoring the racial oppression that precipitated its development.

Movies continue to be troublesome for those who are concerned about the accuracy of the portrayals of the black experience—and consequently the description of black Americans. Before the recent release of these two films, there was Stephen Spielberg's *The Color Purple* (1985), which was praised for its artistry but criticized for its depiction of the black south and the black family. While defenders of the movie argue that it is merely fiction, critics note that one person's fiction is another person's facts, and that the movie has been heralded as a significant work about the black experience, suggesting that what was shown is the way black people are. This point is significant, for the movie, *The Color Purple*, is set in a specific place and time and presents its fictionalized story in structure and content as the way many of the black people lived; however, the life experiences of most southern blacks were not what was shown in this movie.

Patricia Turner's review of *Song of the South* demonstrates the continuing problem of the black image in movies.

Wornie L. Reed, Ph.D., is Chairperson of the Department of Black Studies and Director of the William Monroe Trotter Institute, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

Affirmative Action: Problems and Prospects

by
James Farmer

We live in complicated times today, and one of the sparks that flies off from such complicated times involving difficult issues is that words have all kinds of meanings, and they tend to confuse. I was astonished to hear our president, Ronald Reagan, say that if Dr. King were alive he would agree with him in opposing affirmative action, because King was color-blind and so is Ronald Reagan. This was a stopper, really, a real stopper. It reminded me of the lady who had inherited several million dollars, and because of her good fortune, she quickly engaged a historian to do the story of her family tree. The historian went right to work, did his research, returned shortly to the woman and said, "Lady, I have some bad news for you. I have run into complications. I have discovered that one of your grandfathers was electrocuted at Sing-Sing." She said, "Oh, that's horrible, but you are a historian; you're a scholar. Just cover that up—you know—conceal it so that it cannot be recognized by the reader. So the good doctor went back to his study for further labor. A week later he returned to the woman and read her the following paragraph concerning her errant grandfather: "One of her grandfathers occupied the chair of applied electricity at one of America's well-known institutions. He was very much attached to that position and he died in the harness."

Well, I usually run into that kind of confusion over words. Affirmative action has had an interesting history. I, with no attempted modesty, claim to have proposed the idea to Lyndon Johnson, in either late 1962 or early 1963, when he was Vice President. (The only person I know of who would disagree with me on that is the late Whitney Young, and he is not present to voice his disagreement now). When I reported to the Council on United Civil Rights Leadership, that group that was called the "Big Six" or the "Big Four" by the media, that I had had such a meeting with Vice President Lyndon Johnson and had proposed this idea, to which he gave the name "affirmative action," Whitney said, "Well, I discussed the same idea with Jack Kennedy." So perhaps we, in contemplating the same set of facts, had reached the same conclusion that something new was needed to deal with the terrible job situation that minorities found themselves in. We were making progress, it is true. Blacks were getting better jobs; black income was increasing but that was in absolute terms, not in relative terms. We were not closing the gap. As we (blacks) rose, the majority rose faster; the gap widened, and so we had to do something else. Well, that was one indication of the complex days in which we were entering then.

The simple days were in the early '60's, when the issues were hot dogs at the lunch counter, cups of coffee, front seats of the bus, being able to check into a hotel, eat in a fancy restaurant in Birmingham, Jackson, Montgomery or New Orleans. That was so simple. It separated the sheep from the goats, good from evil, right from wrong. When those four black college freshmen from North Carolina A & T College sat in at the lunch counter at Woolworth in Greensboro February 1, 1960, and asked for coffee, it was very simple. Anybody with any decency, any place in the world, would have argued that of course they should have that coffee if they had the money to pay for it. They were not dirty; they were not drunk; they were not boisterous; they were not creating any disturbance whatsoever. Anybody who said that they should not have been served the coffee had to be a racist. This separated good from evil, separated right from wrong—it was so simple in those days. And furthermore, you could tell at that time when you were winning a battle: if they got the coffee, they had won; if they did not get the coffee, then victory had at least been deferred if not completely lost.

The same was true with the front seat of the bus. If they sat on the front seat of the bus and were not brutalized or savaged, were not jailed or thrown off, then they had won, and anybody of any decency would have agreed that they should have been allowed to sit whereever they wanted to sit. They had paid the same fare that other passengers had paid, and if the bus was going where they had intended to go, and they were creating no disturbance, then they should sit where they wished on a first-come first-served basis. So that was simple. If they sat there, they had won.

That's the way it was in the '60's.

Sometimes you become nostalgic for the simplicity of that time and when the youths of that day were shouting our slogan—ah, how well you must remember it: "Freedom now!" The youths believed that freedom would come by Monday morning if they did certain things: if they went to jail, if they blocked bulldozers or climbed cranes; if their heads were battered in the South, then somehow by mystic means, freedom would come. Those were the simple days, and we kind of looked for simple answers.

Well, we expected answers that were far too simple; they turned out not to be that simple. We won the victories, the short-term victories we sought. We got the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and we got the Voting Rights Act of 1965. But before those victories came, many of us realized that they were short term, not long term, and that the time would come when many of our folk would have the right to sit on the front seat of the bus or buy a hot dog at a lunch counter but would not be able to pay for it or buy the ticket, and that would turn out to be a dirt victory!

So in the meeting with Johnson (he was Vice President and Chairman of President Kennedy's Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity), which a committee of the Congress of Racial Equality had requested, I told the Vice President that we had been studying statistics which showed that while we were moving ahead in some senses—and blacks were getting better jobs, getting promoted, being hired into some non-traditional jobs in small numbers, smaller than we had hoped for—we were not closing the gap. The income gap remained as large, and indeed was widening a bit. And he said, "Yes, I've seen the same statistics; I am just as upset about them as you are, but what do you suggest we do?"

Well, we in CORE had discussed it at some length. We had had what we called bull-sessions about it and had come up with an idea; the idea was suggested by one of my staff, and not by me. He suggested that the back wheels of the car are not going to catch the front wheels of the car as long as they are moving at the same rate of speed. So those back wheels somehow have got to be speeded up if they are going to catch the front wheels of the car. As long as minorities—black people particularly—and that was the major concern at that time, (our sights broadened later on as we went along), but as long as blacks were the built-in rear wheels of the car, we would continue to be a gap behind others. And so, what we had to do was to speed up the progress of the rear wheels.

I said to Johnson that the concept is not really different from the concept of veterans preference. The idea here is that when those young men go into the armed services, they have been outside of the economic mainstream of the nation's life for whatever period of time, a year, two years, three years; so upon reentering civilian life they are at a disadvantage. We have to give them a shove to help them back into the mainstream, to help them catch up. Therefore, veterans receive preference in civil service exams and other things: if you are a veteran then you get higher on that list. And I said blacks have been out of the mainstream forever; they had never been in it. So we need an even bigger boost to get us into that mainstream which we had never yet experienced. He nodded his head and narrowed his eyes, so I went on to say what we are proposing is something that we call—this is a terrible term, "compensatory preferential treatment." Johnson winced. He said, "great idea because we got to do something like that."

Then he used another analogy. He said, "If two men are running a race and one of them has a ball and chain right around his ankle, and he is there at the starting line fussing with that ball and chain while his opponent is half way around the track running like mad, you can't cut those chains off and say, 'now you're free, you're free and equal, run the race.' That's not fair," said Johnson. "That's not fair; the other man's half way around the track. Somehow we got to start them at the same place or get this fellow up where he can catch up with the other man, then say run the race as equals." He said, "But don't call it . . . what did you call it? Compensatory what?" And he said, "Oh, that's awful; that's calculated to raise a hackle on everybody—get everybody mad at you." He said, "No, what you're going to call it—let's see—we got to move forward, we got to move forthrightly, be positive about it, move positively, move affirmatively . . . yes, that's it—'Affirmative Action'! "

Well, he made a speech at Howard University using his analogy of the runners. Affirmative action became official policy of the Federal Government. Then shortly after that, they told a story about President Kennedy stepping off a plane one day, looking at the Honor Guard there to meet him, and observing that there were no blacks there. He called the officer over and commented on that fact. The officer smiled and said, "That's correct, Mr. President; you see, none have applied." The President said "Well go out and find some." That was affirmative action. That flew in the face of the old concept of color-blindness. What we had been saying to employers and to other decision makers in the society, including educational administrators in institutions of higher education, was "Be color-blind, be absolutely color-blind, don't see color when you see an applicant for a job or admission. Just hire the best qualified person who happens to apply for that job. That's all; that's all you need to do; you will fulfill your duty, fulfill all the requirements. And do not discriminate; do not refuse to hire or admit anybody because of his or her color." That's all we asked of them; we asked them to be color-blind.

Well, that color-blindness really did not work. We longed for color-blindness. I remember in the early days of CORE—and there are very few people here old enough to remember 1942 when we were organizing CORE in Chicago—the white CORE members who were as dedicated as I, more dedicated if that were possible, believed passionately in color-blindness.

I remember Bernice Fisher, who was one of the founders of CORE. She was a good friend of mine. We would get together and argue and debate the ideas that went into the formation of CORE, and she talked about color-blindness. She would tell herself and tell all of us the story which everybody has heard, about the kid in first grade who came home one day—he was a white kid—and told

his mother about this wonderful new friend he had in school in the first grade. He came home the next day talking about this marvelous new friend. The mother said, "Well where does he live?" "He doesn't live around here; he doesn't live around us; he lives a long way from here." And the next day he talked about the friend again. The mother asked him rather suspiciously, "Is your friend a Negro?" The boy looked up and thought, "Gosh, I don't know, I forgot to look." He said, "I'll look tomorrow and let you know." We told ourselves that story over and over again. How Bernice laughed and how all of us laughed. We told ourselves that that's the way we were: we were color-blind; the nation was going to become color-blind; we were going to make it color-blind. And so what we were saying to employers prior to affirmative action was, "be color-blind."

Indeed, the first Fair Employment Practices legislation was color-blind legislation. There was that executive order extracted from Franklin Delano Roosevelt by the late great A. Phillip Randolph, who was, in my judgment, one of the greatest black leaders this nation has produced. (Many here who would not recognize his name, would say, "A. Phillip who?") Randolph had proposed a march on Washington way back in 1941, before Pearl Harbor. It was to take place early that year and he, in his thundering voice, held mass meetings at parks throughout the country and he packed them in. He was the premier black leader those days. Randolph said, "In my opinion discrimination in employment, in government or industry, will not cease until the President and the Congress of the United States see 5,000, 10,000, 25,000 (petitioners)." Big terms then, unprecedentally big terms and when it caught fire, people applauded so much Randolph pursued the idea of the march in his speeches. He got the backing of the Walter White of the NAACP and Lester Granger of the Urban League, and continued to talk about it. Roosevelt was upset because America was the arsenal of democracy. We were defending democracy and freedom against tyrants, fighting against the master race theory of Adolph Hitler and against fascist Italy. And if the whole world saw 25,000 black Americans coming as close to the lawn of the White House as they could get, probably protesting discrimination in employment in defense industries as well as the government of this arsenal of democracy, how embarrassing that would be!

Roosevelt, of course, was upset. Eleanor Roosevelt made a trip to New York, met with Randolph and Walter White and Lester Granger and asked them what they wanted her to do to facilitate the matter. They wanted a meeting with the President, face to face. The meeting was set up by Eleanor. At the meeting Roosevelt said, "Gentlemen, you must not march on Washington; you cannot do it." "What, Mr. President," asked Randolph, "would you be prepared to do to persuade us to call off our plans?" "What do you wish me to do, Mr. Randolph?" "We want an executive order outlawing discrimination in employment in government and industry on grounds of race, creed, color or national origin." Said the President, "You shall have it." That was Executive Order 8802; it set up the first Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) to oversee it.

Various states passed FEPC laws after that. They were color-blind (laws); the laws said to employers: be color-blind, be oblivious to race, to color, to nationality for anyone who applies; just hire the best qualified. Now this assumed—which we were not really conscious of at the time—a color-blind society in order for it to work. It assumed that the employer would act in good faith; it assumed, too, that blacks would apply in reasonable numbers, feeling confident that they would have the same chance as anyone else to get the job. It assumed that they would know about the job, that it would be publicized through media which reached them as well as it reached others at the time. Well, it didn't work. We'd go back to an employer after a while and say, "Now Mr. Employer, you had a year of Fair Employment Practices Commission activity, how many blacks did you hire?" His answer would be: "How the hell should I know, I'm color-blind like you told me to be." We'd take a visual check and find out he had none. He'd say, "So what, have you proved that I refused to hire somebody who was better qualified than those whom I hired. If not, you have no complaint—dry up." Obviously it wasn't working.

One other illustration. CORE in the early 1960's had a campaign against job discrimination in a chain of hamburger joints in the Bronx—White Tower or White Castles, something like that—at which the only blacks and Puerto Ricans that they employed were janitors in the janitorial service. We had investigated carefully; we tried to negotiate. They said, "we have nothing to talk about with you." So we picketed. This wasn't in Birmingham; it was in the Bronx, and we had garbage thrown at us, a cross was burned in the window. We continued picketing. We persevered.

Finally, management sat down to talk and what the manager said to me was, "Mr. Farmer, you are absolutely right. You have pointed out in your leaflets that the only blacks and Puerto Ricans in our employ are in the janitorial service. That is correct." He said, "We would like to correct it, but we can't because we project that we will have need for about 75 sales personnel within the next 60 days, (sales personnel were counter people), and we would like to hire blacks and Puerto Ricans to make up for the deficit of the present and past, but we can't do it." "Why can't you," I asked. The manager smiled and said, "Because it would be against the law. We are told by the law to be color-blind and if we get our employees from the State Employment Service and ask them to send us 75 black and Puerto Rican applicants, they will immediately charge us with violating the State Fair Employment Practices Law which says that we may not consider race or color in seeking job applicants or workers." So he smiled—rather triumphantly, I thought.

I asked for a recess and called a buddy of mine who works for the State Employment Service and said, "Jack, you realize the law is archaic." He said, "Of course, it's one of those color-blind laws that you and a lot of people like you fought so hard to get a few years ago." I explained the problem we had with this chain of hamburger joints and asked for his suggestion. He said, "Well I'll tell you

what Jim, go back into your negotiations and ask this manager to call me. Tell him don't write but call and tell me of his needs within 60 days—75 people and he would like blacks and Puerto Ricans. Tell him to tell me that over the phone and I will then call our office on 125th Street in Harlem and ask them to send him 75 qualified applicants regardless of race, color, creed or national origin."

Well, here was a recognition that the law was outmoded—the color-blind law and our seeking to find some way around it. Well, obviously, that's not the way to operate in a society that respects law. We had to find something new. What was new, then, was affirmative action, which flew in the face of the concept of equal treatment. We were asking for something more than equal treatment for those of unequal status. Now after my meeting with Johnson, when I reported on this to the Council on United Civil Rights Leadership, there was no unanimity of approval there. Roy Wilkins, who was a good friend of mine and a man whom I respected highly, (I think he was one of the brightest of the Civil Rights Leaders), raised some questions about it. He said, "Jim, I don't think it would fly in America. I don't think it would fly because here you are moving a step beyond asking for equal treatment; you are asking for special treatment, by whatever name you call it." And he says, "Americans will buy equal treatment but will not buy special treatment." I argued that asking for equal treatment for those of unequal status would not remove the inequality. Wilkins said, "That may be true, but I am still not prepared to buy your alternative as a workable plan." There were others who disagreed later on, others whose names would be recognizable, who felt that this just would not go in America.

After it became a Federal policy, the Government began using it in its contracts with industry, requiring that industry report on the number of minorities in various job categories. If there was inequity, the industry was required to show improvement each year at the risk of possible loss of the contract. This became a policy of the Federal Government. Now it did work hardship on people. There is just no question about it, and I could understand it. I am not one of those who feels that anybody who disagrees with us on the intricacies of affirmative action is automatically, ipso facto, a racist. It is not true; things are not simple as they were in the '60's.

Affirmative action didn't work the first couple of years, by the way. We'd go back to an employer then and say: "Look, you've been practicing affirmative action for two years and that said you had to go out and seek members of minorities to fill jobs. How many minorities do you have now?" What was the answer? In more cases than not, the answer was, "Well Jim, God knows I've tried; I've tried hard but I couldn't find any that were qualified." Then we had another problem. Alright, we got affirmative action, moving a step forward, beyond equal treatment but still, this doesn't work. How are we going to prove whether this man, this woman—probably a man then because of the discrimination against women, (there were very few women who were in those decision making spots at that time). How are we going to prove that this man has tried honestly? How are we going to prove that he has acted in good faith and could not find a qualified person?

Well, we, by "we" I mean the Movement, came up with the idea of numerical goals and timetables, someway to test a man's good faith. He says, "I've tried." We would say "Look, you've tried but you're gonna have to try harder because you have a goal here and this is a goal that you are going to have to move toward." Not a quota, we argued, because a quota is hard and fixed, inflexible; a goal is something that you move toward, must show progress toward. The supervisors, the line managers, those who hire, fire and promote, will prove their efficiency by meeting the other criteria which the company has established, and this one additional criterion: how well they have pursued the goal of the affirmative action. We are not asking, of course, that unqualified people apply or be hired. Oh, no, no, just know that they are qualified to be hired, and then hire them.

Now we are being told that yes, but affirmative action has done so much damage it has made people lazy. Well, for all of these years, white males have had affirmative action; they have had preferential treatment. I haven't noticed that it has made most of them lazy; they seem pretty aggressive and moving ahead, in spite of having had preferential treatment, having had affirmative action. I don't think affirmative action makes people lazy. It happens to have quite the opposite effect. Now it is quite possible that some persons of less than adequate qualifications have slipped through, but that's true in any system that is established. I don't know any system that is fool-proof and has not made an error. But the system itself, the affirmative action system, has been good.

But then, what about the argument of quotas? What about it? For years we fought against quotas. Quotas were used in university after university, professional school after professional school, to exclude or limit the number of various minorities: blacks, Hispanics, Jews—and we fought hard. I know. When I was living in New York City, many, many years during that period, we fought in New York State against those institutions' quotas. We fought to have those quotas removed and we won the battle. We got those quotas licked. As far as I know, they're out. They *had* quotas too. Usually they didn't deny it or couldn't deny it. They wouldn't say they had a quota against Jews; they would say they had quotas on New Yorkers because they didn't want to be swamped with people from New York, but everybody knew what they meant: they had a quota on Jews, and we fought against it.

So you see, now it's difficult for many people to see. When we turn around, the agendas have changed. Time has moved on, and in order to make additional progress, it is perceived as necessary to have something similar to quotas. In spite of the argument which I made, it's not a quota; the differences are clear; it's *similar* to quotas. Those who say it is a quota—I wouldn't argue too hard with them on it. We use something *like* quotas to make further progress. "Quotas were bad then, and they are bad now," they would argue. It is hard for some people to see that they may be useful now when they were wrong then.

They were wrong when they were used to *exclude*; now they can be used to *include* those who have been excluded.

Some great thinkers and people of warm, great, big hearts have been unable to agree with that. To name just one, the Late Justice William O. Douglas, great old warhorse with all progressive causes. But in the DeFunis case which preceded Bakke by some years, DeFunis had applied for admission to the law school at the University of Washington State and had been turned down. He took it to court. He finally got it to the Supreme Court, arguing as Bakke had that he was turned down because they had a quota for blacks, and blacks were admitted who were less qualified than he; therefore, he was discriminated against because of his color, white. When it got to the Supreme Court, DeFunis has already been admitted to law school at the University of Washington, and in fact had graduated, it took so long. So the Supreme Court was able to sidestep the substantive issue by ruling it a moot case. But Justice Douglas felt so strongly on this issue that he sat down and wrote a decision of his own, an opinion which was classic liberalism of two decades earlier, New Deal liberalism which had to view any use of quotas as wrong because it viewed the fight against quotas as a principle, not a tactic. It was a beautifully worded opinion; it would have been a classic document in my opinion had it been written two decades earlier. But written when it was, in my judgment, it was archaic and obsolete. "For time makes ancient good uncouth," to quote an old poem and a hymn.

The fight against quotas was never an absolute, never a matter of principle, but a matter of tactic. It was not a quota that was bad; it was how the quota was used. If it's used to keep people out—it's bad; if it's used to bring people in, then it is good. Yet there are so many emotions around, how can we keep it a live concept and keep it going? I raised that question a number of years ago with a group of management interns in a government department (Defense Department). These were college students. One very bright college student, a management intern at the Department Of Defense, came up with an idea. Imaginative, not without flaws but imaginative, and that's what it's going to take today, I think: compromise, dialogue, negotiation, use of imagination to find some alterations that are more widely acceptable. He said, "Just a minute Mr. Farmer, let's take the University of Washington and DeFunis." He said, "O.K., we can say that two applicants are highly qualified; A and B are highly qualified." I doubt that we can say A is more qualified than B because A scored 5 points higher than B on a test, but we can say that both are qualified; maybe B speaks better, maybe B improvises more with his clients; maybe B can wheel and deal better with the Honorable Judge in his cloak-room, but we can say that A and B are both qualified. Suppose the University of Washington Law School had had space for 100 applicants; suppose then they had selected 1,000 of the best qualified applicants during all the criteria, and then suppose they would select the 100 they needed out of that 1,000 by random selection, a lottery". He said, "Now if DeFunis were in the 1,000 and not in the 100, could he then claim discrimination in reverse? I doubt it," said this management intern.

I thought it was a very imaginative suggestion, not without flaws, because the crux of the matter is how to select the 1,000 or what the criteria are or the assumption is. And it *is* an assumption, that if you pick 1,000 there will be representative sprinklings of minorities and of women, and so on. Maybe there won't be. We are supposing only that DeFunis is not in that thousand. But suppose no blacks are in it; then blacks couldn't claim discrimination either, could they? And we wouldn't accept that as a substitute for affirmative action. So it's not unflawed, but maybe we are going to have to sit down and work out some way that we can win back some of the allies who have been lost in the struggle.

I think the basic principle of affirmative action must not be lost. It is not true, Mr. President, Mr. Ronald Reagan, that Martin Luther King would have agreed with you that affirmative action should go, or that numerical goals and time tables, if that is what you're saying, should go. Remember that Dr. King spoke of the color-blind society where a black child and a white child hold hands, play together as brothers, and where a person would be judged not by the color of skin but by the content of character. He put that in the form of a dream, of the future, a future nation. He rocked back on his heels and said "I have a dream that one day." It was a dream of a nation to come, of a nation that we would bring about, not a nation that exists. You do not bring that dream about, you do not create equality by deceiving yourself into thinking that it is already here. In India they wrote affirmative action into their constitution in the '50's when the nation was formed after independence from Britain; This was affirmative action to help the outcasts, the untouchables, to move them up. I said, "Well, how did you come to the conclusion that that was necessary?" They said, "It's elementary, Brother Farmer, it is elementary. You do not achieve equality for those of unequal status by treating them equally. You cannot treat those of unequal status equally and hope to achieve equality of status." So true. India accepted that as a foregone conclusion, something that should not indeed be questioned. But is is being questioned here, now, and it will be questioned even more.

Frankly, I do not believe in deceiving ourselves at all. I think we would probably lose a referendum on affirmative action with numerical goals and timetables in any community in the country, and in any city in the country except the city that's predominantly black. We would win it in Washington, D.C.; we'd win it in—what's the town in Mississippi—all black? Mount Bayou. We'd win it there. I think we would lose it in Boston; we'd lose it in Chicago; we'd lose it in New York; we'd lose it in Philadelphia; we'd lose it in Atlanta; we'd lose it in Detroit. I think we'd lose it all over.

You see I've talked too long and I must bring it to a conclusion now. Remember that times have changed. They have changed for the better in many ways. We wrought significant changes in the '60's, the great Movement did. We battled down American-style apartheid and relegated it to the historical scrapheap. The 'For Colored' and 'For White' signs now crop up in museums where they should

be. But it has changed for the worse in some ways. In 1963, in the Fall—this was after the March in Washington—public opinion polls showed that more than 75 percent of the American people wanted strong, new civil rights legislation with teeth in it and wanted to see it enforced. This was white, black, north, south, east, west. They were on our side; we couldn't lose. We had to win; we had won already because we had swung public opinion to our side.

But public opinion changed. The back-lash began developing in the middle '60's. Oh, people were frightened by Black Power, talk of revolution, by publicity of inner-city crime, muggings, rapes and murders. They were frightened by political capital made of the busing issue and of the welfare chiselers issue; they were frightened by the summer riots and the riots in the wake of Dr. King's assassination. Those of lower middle classes were frightened because there was job training for unskilled blacks and Hispanics and Native Americans with modern techniques and modern equipment, and they feared they were being trained for their jobs and they thought their jobs would be in jeopardy and the gains which they had made, they thought might be lost. Those who have one foot up the ladder are terrified when there is motion from below them. So it changed. By the middle '70's, public opinion polls showed that the majority of the American people felt, first, that there was no longer any systemic racial discrimination except in reverse, and second, that blacks had moved too far too fast, had gotten too much too fast. In the '60's we were victims and popular. Nobody would have dared have a cocktail party without having at least one of us there. We were a very popular people then. But in the '70's and into the '80's, we were viewed more as victimizers, not as victims. We were victims before, victims of oppression—long suffering, now victimizers. We have to change that around. We are going to need the alliance, the friendship, the coalition, the help of all of those of goodwill. If I may close with the words of Hillel, a Rabbi of 2,000 years ago: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am for myself alone what am I? And if not now, when?"

From a speech by Mr. Farmer at the University of Massachusetts at Boston on March 5, 1986, in the William Monroe Trotter Institute Distinguished Lecture Series on affirmative action.

The Economic Status of Blacks in Boston

by
James E. Blackwell

In recent years, special attention has been given to problems of racism in Boston. Without question, highly publicized steps have been taken by civic, business, religious, and neighborhood groups to combat racism, bigotry and discrimination. Frequently, these initiatives have also been supported by municipal and state governments or administrations. Strategies for improving the racial climate in Boston, initiated by the Covenant for Racial Justice, the Boston Committee, the Coalition for a Better Boston, and now, the newly created PARTNERSHIP, as well as some pronouncements of the (Mayor) Flynn and (Governor) Dukakis administrations must be applauded. However, despite such courses of actions, there is convincing evidence to support the contention that the roots of racial and ethnic discrimination have not been fully addressed. Further, there exists a telling discontinuity between rhetoric and demonstrated success in alleviating the basic problems of racial discord and race-based exclusion from the social and economic infrastructure of the Boston community.

In the monograph, *The Emerging Black Community of Boston*,[1] I focused on structural barriers and conditions which either accelerate or impede access and upward mobility of blacks in the occupational structure. This work offered a description of the general economic conditions and status of blacks in Boston at mid-1985. The theoretical underpinnings of the paper were sociological, social-psychological and economic interpretations of prejudice and discrimination in the marketplace. Trend data on the character of that discrimination, the underrepresentation of blacks in public and private sector employment, poverty, unemployment, and income—all were obtained from a variety of sources. The trend data covered a period from 1979 to mid-1985. Since the publication of this document, I have examined additional data, some of which were generated by the Flynn Administration.

My conclusions remain unchanged! Despite the enormous economic boom currently experienced by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the City of Boston, and despite some improvements in their status, *blacks and*

other minorities have not shared equally and fully in this recovery. The unemployment rate among blacks is still twice that of whites. The teenage unemployment rate among blacks and Hispanics is more than triple that of whites. Poverty is widespread in the black and Latino communities. In city-controlled jobs, despite the existence of a Boston Residency Jobs Ordinance, blacks and Hispanics continue to be concentrated in the lower-paying entry level jobs. There is a white monopoly on higher-paying executive, managerial, and officer positions in the city and state-controlled jobs as well as in the private sector. The Executive Ordinance issued in July 1985 which extends the requirements of the Boston Residency Jobs Ordinance to the private sector has not been enforced. No plan for its implementation has been publicized. No affirmative action policy has been either implemented or publicized. And, as the Boston Redevelopment Authority stated in a report issued last year, "in Boston, there is poverty amidst affluence." Much, much more has to be done to translate rhetoric and "good will" into concrete action that will alleviate the untoward economic conditions of the outsider groups in Boston.

Evidence to Support These Conclusions?

Reports from the Boston Redevelopment Authority show that since 1976 Boston has experienced a major construction boom. Reports from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts show that the State has been privileged with unparalleled economic growth. As a result of this economic expansion, the State could boast in February 1986 of a 3.7 percent unemployment rate, tied with New Hampshire for the lowest unemployment rate in the nation. The Governor of the Commonwealth claims that this recovery is so magnificent and pervasive that it may be necessary for Massachusetts to import workers in order to meet job needs within the State.

Ganz and Perkins,[2] writing for the Boston Redevelopment Authority and, by definition, the City of Boston, stated that the "structural transformation" of the city's economy has meant a movement away from large scale manufacturing and wholesale trade to service activities, particularly in communications, business and professional services, higher education and other related areas. They reported in 1985 that Boston experienced a net gain of 77,000 jobs between 1976 and 1984. These jobs were distributed principally as follows: 14,000 in business and professional services; 17,000 in higher education and medicine; 15,000 in finances; 7,000 in communications; 7,500 in retail trade, and 2,500 in the hotel industry. Many areas of net gain are precisely the areas in which the participation rate of blacks and other minorities is much lower than warranted.

Further, some 18,000 new jobs were created in Boston in 1984 and another 10,000 were created in 1985. It is projected that between 1985 and 1995, some *100,000 new jobs* will be created in the city of Boston alone. A significant proportion of jobs generated since 1976, as well as those projected for the future, are in the downtown area in which blacks and other residents of Boston, white and non-black minorities, have less than a fair chance of employment. A considerable proportion of the 100,000 new jobs will be generated by "a projected $6.2 billion in new construction."[3] Of that sum, $2.7 billion will be realized from development projects now underway and which are scheduled for completion between 1985 and 1988. These projections include a gain of 56,000 office jobs; 15,500 manufacturing jobs; 5,400 hotel jobs, and 9,000 retail trade jobs. The ten "downtown development projects" alone will result in 13,843 construction jobs and 24,735 permanent jobs. However, these are private development enterprises. The employment record of these firms with respect to blacks, Hispanics, Asians and Boston residents is atrocious.

According to data collected during my interviews, there is not now—and never has been—a single black construction firm involved in any aspect of the downtown construction projects. Blacks were not involved anywhere in the re-development of Fanueil Hall and Quincy Market. Labor unions continue to be anti-black, and often anti-city residents, with respect to permitting access to their apprenticeship training programs and, of course, in their hiring practices. As a result of these situations, it is estimated by city officials that only 35 percent of jobs in Boston are held by Boston residents. It is also estimated that between 75 and 80 percent of all downtown jobs with salaries in excess of $15,000 per year are held by non-Boston residents. Is there any wonder, then, that Boston has one of the highest poverty rates of any city in the nation?

Further evidence of the assertion that blacks have not shared fully in the economic boom in Boston and of the persistence of discrimination and racial exclusion in the market place comes from such areas as investigative reporters (e.g. the Pulitzer Prize winning group from the Boston Globe), data generated from the Regional Office of the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and an examination of data generated by the City of Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. These data often demonstrate trends, changes, or stability over a specific time period, from 1972 to 1985. These data consistently reveal pervasive underutilization of blacks, and the effects of prejudice and white preference in the marketplace. This is true, whether we focus on city and state-controlled jobs or in the private sector. The results are uniform when we examine the full range of occupational positions: from the chief executive officers, the executive officers, managers, administrators, sales clerks, professionals, technicians, clerical workers, to crafts workers, and in some areas, the service workers. *There is clearly a white preference, not an equality of opportunity for jobs in Boston.* This finding holds in every type of institution, business enterprise, and organization in the city. It is true for the newspapers, banking institutions, colleges and universities, insurance companies, printing companies, high technology firms, communications, general merchandise stores, food stores, hotels, and restaurants. The statistical data presented in my report[1] reveal the pervasiveness of minority underrepresentation and white preference in all of these areas.

Employment in Municipal Government

There is no reason to deny the fact that under the Flynn Administration improvements have been made toward addressing some of the critical issues of unemployment, income inequities, lack of access to city-controlled jobs, and poverty. The same must be said, and has been reported, with respect to the *second* Dukakis Administration. At the same time, it is equally imperative to recognize the immense disparity between rhetoric and concrete action. It is concrete action, not rhetoric, which results in meaningful social change and economic empowerment for the outsider groups. I wish to focus specific attention now on two areas of employment with city government: (1) total work force and (2) new hires. Then, some attention will be given to the race variable in the distribution of state-controlled jobs.

The data reported in my chapter in *The Emerging Black Community in Boston* represented May 1985 findings on total city employment by income and race.[1] It showed that the underutilization of blacks is widespread throughout city government. It also showed that the severity of the problem varies by department. Nevertheless, it was quite evident that the white monopoly of certain jobs was more manifest in twelve departments or divisions, including the Retirement Board, Administrative Service, Inspectional Services, City Clerk's Office, Treasury Department, Election Department, Finance Commission, Law Department, Real Property Department, Environmental Department, the Court House Commission and the Registry of Deeds. The city's own data also showed that one-third of all persons earning between $6,000 and $9,999 were black; approximately one-fourth of those earning between $10,000 and $12,000 were black. However, 96 percent of all persons with incomes in excess of $33,000 per year were white, and the data showed that at all levels between $13,000 and $29,000 in annual incomes, more than 80 percent were white. These data did not include the 3,000 employees in Health and Hospitals. When they are included, the evidence shows that in 1985 about 40 percent of all Health and Hospital employees were black and/or Hispanic. However, these two groups comprise 93 percent of all the workers in the two lowest pay categories, while whites comprise 90 percent of all persons holding upper echelon jobs.

Recently, I made a comparison of income distributions by race among the total work force of the city government for the fourth quarter of 1984 and the fourth quarter of 1985. This analysis does, indeed, confirm increasing access to city-controlled jobs by blacks and minorities. Much more should be said about these reports. By the end of the fourth quarter in 1984, minorities represented 17.87 percent of the total work force. This percentage rose to 19.46 percent at the end of 1985. During the same period, the percent black in the total work force rose from 14.35 to 15.2 percent, or slightly less than one full percent in the aggregate. Further, this analysis reveals that the higher the income level, the greater is the white monopoly, and greater is the underrepresentation of blacks, Hispanics and Asians.

In 1985, blacks comprised 12.1 percent of persons earning under $6,000 per year; 36.8 percent of those earning between $6,000 and $9,999 (below poverty level wages); 24.1 percent of those earning between $10,000 and 12,999 (at the poverty level); about 15 percent of those earning between $16,000 and 29,999; but only about 3 percent of those with earnings in excess of $30,000. As in 1984, whites in 1985 held about 96 percent of all the managerial and executive level jobs in city government.

I also made a similar analysis of "new hires" in city government, utilizing city-generated data. The period of comparison is the fourth quarter of 1984 with the fourth quarter of 1985. (See Table 1.)

Table 1

Percent Minority By Income for City Government Work Force: 1984 and 1985

	Percent Minority			
Income	1984	(Minority/ Blacks)	1985	Direction of Change
Less than 6,000	64.44	(-/-)	59.18	-
6,000- 9,999	42.86	(-/-)	37.50	-
10,000-12,999	26.32	(-/-)	28.89	+
13,000-15,999	12.00	(3/3)	15.63	+
16,000-19,999	50.00	(9/9)	13.04	-
20,000-24,999	46.03	(25/25)	41.67	-
25,000-29,999	40.00	(2/2)	14.29	-
30,000-32,999	0.00	(-/-)	0.00	-
33,000-over	20.00	(1/1)	0.00	-

Note: In 1985 (4th Qtr), 88 minorities (incl. 61 blacks) were hired. However, 69 of that 88, or 78.3 percent, were hired in jobs which paid less than $16,000 per year, and 64 or 72 percent, were hired in jobs that paid less than $13,000 per year, which is about the poverty level in Boston.

Unmistakably, the city is hiring more blacks. The problem is that they are hired in entry-level positions which result in low wages. In turn, they are confronted with enormous problems of inadequate housing, maintaining an acceptable living standard, and difficulties in supporting a family.

Employment in State-Controlled Jobs

The Massachusetts State Office of Affirmative Action reported in 1984 that blacks held 8.36 percent of the statewide work force of 92,310 persons. The percent minority in the state's work force rose from 7 to 11 percent between 1980 and 1984. In 1984, blacks and other minorities were unevenly distributed with respect to job categories as well as among the fifteen Secretariats of State Government. Black males represented 3.4 percent of the officials and administrators, 1.3 percent of the professionals, 2.7 percent of the technicians, 3.5 percent of the skilled craft positions and 9.5 percent of all lower-paying positions. Black females constituted 3.0 percent of the officials and administrators, 2.8 percent of the professionals, 5.8 percent of the technicians, 9 percent of persons holding clerical positions, and 0.4 percent of the skilled crafts positions. Black women also comprised 3.4 percent of the 12,725 workers classified in lower-paying positions.

Not only is there an underutilization of blacks by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, but there is a significant shortage of black males in such positions. Within the fifteen Secretariats of State Government, blacks comprise 3.4 and 3.0 percent for males and females, respectively. Among this group, blacks are more likely to be employed in Higher Education, Human Services and in the Economic and Manpower Secretariat than among other secretariats. However, in higher education, blacks hold only 2.8 percent of the faculty positions; and there are several state colleges without a single black faculty member, including Framingham State College, Greenfield Community College, Massachusetts Maritime Academy, Middlesex College and Quinsigamond Community College. The highest percentage of black and minority faculty among all state-supported institutions is found at the University of Massachusetts at Boston which reported a 6.8 percent representation. Private institutions do not fare as well as public institutions in the recruitment, hiring and promotion of black and other minority faculty members.

Most colleges and universities in Massachusetts have a shameful record with respect to the recruitment and hiring of blacks and other minorities. Some departments within these institutions have never employed a single black person.

Consequences of the Employment Profile

The consequences of the employment profile described to this point are reflected in the extensive poverty rate of Boston. It is estimated by the Boston Redevelopment Authority that within five years, approximately 25 percent of all Bostonians will be in poverty. The national rate now is only about 15 percent. The BRA also reports that in 1985, some 44 percent of Boston's population is low income—that is, "earning no more than twice the poverty level" (of $10,609 for a family of four). A significant proportion of the low-income population in Boston is found in the black and Hispanic populations. When one compares employment, income, and unemployment across neighborhood lines, immediately observable is the fact of high concentrations of the unemployed, under-employed, and low-income in those neighborhoods populated by minority groups. So, when the Governor speaks of the need to import workers, we may wish to ask him to take a ride on the Orange Line, the Red Line, and walk through the neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester, South Boston and East Boston and talk to people out of work but who would relish employment by the city, state or private sector.

What Can Be Done?

We are cognizant of a number of initiatives already implemented for the alleviation of some of these problems. The Governor's Executive Search Program, and his Executive Orders 235, 236, and 246 as well as rigorous monitoring of discriminatory practices by the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination are important beginnings. But much more must be done. At the municipal level, the promulgation of the Boston Residency Jobs Ordinance in 1983, its extension by an Executive Order in July 1985, and the establishment of a Municipal Office of Affirmative Action are equally positive signs.

We may also applaud efforts to address teenage unemployment through programs such as Boston Works, the Boston Compact, the Private Industry Council, and the special efforts of organizations such as the Urban League, Action for Boston Community, the Job Corps, and Jobs for Youth.

However, major problems persist. It is their existence in 1986 which underlie the disparity between good intention rhetoric and actual implementation of strategies to eliminate economic inequities between the races. To be specific: while it is true that the public sector has a better track record for overall employment than does the private sector, the fact remains that blacks and other minorities are more likely to be hired in lower level jobs or on the secondary tier of a split labor market. The Boston Residency Jobs Ordinance has, indeed, brought many jobs to the target groups. However, a look at Copley Place is instructive, for it reaffirms the position of unequal distribution of blacks and other minorities throughout the work force. Further, neither the Ordinance nor its Executive extension to the private sector has been rigorously enforced. According to reports obtained for this presentation, there are still no enforcement mechanisms in place; there are no sanctions and no penalties in place for those persons who do not meet hiring policies. There is no money allocated for enforcement and compliance. There are no blacks doing business in Fanueil Hall and Quincy Market. McDonalds in Lafayette Place is the only franchise operated by a black person in downtown Boston. There does not appear to be a firm monitoring policy for the enforcement of the residency requirements. Blacks still do not have access to union-controlled jobs because of the historic patterns of exclusion found among unions.

Why Sanctions Are Needed

1. Sanctions are costs. A cost for discrimination prevents some people from actualizing prejudiced attitudes into overt discriminatory behavior. If sanctions are high or detrimental to the economic or social well-being of the discriminator, discrimination may be lessened.
2. If discriminators sense that anti-discriminatory policies are not likely to be enforced, there is no perceived cost for discrimination. Discrimination is likely to continue.
3. Effectiveness of public policy designed to correct social and economic inequality requires leverage used in creative ways.

The City still has not effectively used its leverage to persuade compliance to affirmative action in procurement or purchasing; nor has it used its leverage with respect to zoning restrictions and demanding escrows for developers that do not have a record of compliance.

It seems to me that a coherent policy strategy combines the kinds of projections for job creation with an effective training and recruitment program to be simultaneously implemented. Training programs begin in family attitudes toward schooling and preparation for work, and re-socialization of young people for the requirements of the world of work—language, attitudes, presentation of self, inter-personal relationships, punctuality, and so on. It demands quality schooling and an interesting and stimulating learning environment so as to stem the horrendous drop-out rate among blacks and Hispanics. It means communication and liaison between colleges and school systems to create an awareness of market needs so that young people will prepare themselves for the kinds of positions that are available and will be created in the near future. It requires a re-examination of admissions policies and practices and a new assessment of institutional environments to make learning itself more attractive and meaningful. Clearly, commitment to the goal of economic equity and the elimination of inequities will require all of this and more. It can be done. It must be done.

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James E. Blackwell, Ph.D., is Professor of Sociology, and Research Associate at the William Monroe Trotter Institute, University of Massachusetts at Boston. This article is the edited transcript of a presentation made at the University of Massachusetts at Boston on March 11, 1986.

Some Observations on *Closing The Gap*

by

Jeremiah P. Cotton

James P. Smith and Finis R. Welch, along with fellow economist Richard B. Freeman, have been primarily responsible for the much accepted notion that there have been "dramatic" advances in the economic situation of blacks in the recent past. *Closing The Gap: 40 Years of Economic Progress for Blacks* (CTG)[1] is just the latest installment and reworking of this optimism. Freeman attributed the alleged progress to a "collapse" of labor market discrimination caused by "governmental and related antidiscrimination activity associated with the 1964 Civil Rights Act."[2] Smith and Welch (hereinafter S&W), on the other hand, have always been somewhat agnostic about the efficacy of affirmative action. Instead, they have consistently sought to show that the longrun progress they claim for blacks has been due to two major factors: the improvement in the quantity and quality of black education and the great North to South, rural to urban, migration undertaken by blacks during the 1940's, 50's and 60's.

They concede that there have been other developments during subperiods of the 1940–80 period that may have had some short term effects on black progress and examine three of them. The first is the revolution of Southern agriculture following the introduction of the mechanical cotton picker and other technologies. The second is the decline in black male labor force participation, and the third, of course, is affirmative action.

Although Freeman and S&W were not entirely agreed on the causes of black progress, they were as one on the fact of it. In *CTG*, S&W present evidence indicating that the black male average weekly wage as a percent of the white male wage increased significantly between 1940 and 1980. "(In 1940) the typical black male worker earned only 43 percent as much as his white counterpart. By 1980, the average black man in the labor force earned 73 percent as much as the typical white man." This increase in weekly wages was spread across all work experience

classes and was most pronounced among those blacks with less than 10 years of experience. Indeed, the finding of an inverse correlation between the size of the wage gap and black work experience supports the well known "vintage" hypothesis put forward by S&W, which claims that younger black cohorts entering the labor market over time have been the beneficiaries of better educational opportunities than were available to older black cohorts who are now gradually being replaced. One can therefore expect to observe a steady increase in the skills of the black male work force and in the remuneration to those skills.

S&W also purport to show that these gains in wage and salary income have been widely distributed among the black male population as a whole. For whereas in 1940 only 22 percent of black men had incomes that would qualify them for inclusion in the white middle class, by 1980, 68 percent of black men had such incomes. They thus claim that a "spectacular" growth in the size of the black middle class has occurred over the 40 year period—so much so until they now outnumber the black poor.

Finally, S&W argue that the wage gains experienced by black men will be maintained over their work careers.

For S&W the two facets of educational attainment that played the major role in the narrowing of the racial wage gap were the decline in the differences in black–white years of schooling and school quality, and an increase in benefits to blacks from additional years of schooling. In 1940, the average number of years of school completed by white males 16 to 64 years of age was 9.4, twice that of blacks, which was 4.7 years. By 1980, the white average had risen to 12.5 years and black average to nearly 11 years. The percentage increase in years of schooling for blacks over this period was therefore significantly greater than that for whites.

As for the returns on education, the black male weekly wage in 1940 was only 50 to 55 percent as high as the white wage among blacks and whites with comparable education. By 1980, it had risen to 70 to 80 percent as high. S&W also found that among those in their first years of work in 1940, white male wages increased 5 percent more than did those of black males for each additional year of schooling, and increased 20 percent more among those who attended and completed college. But these advantages declined as each new black cohort entered the labor market. The improvement in the quality of black schooling was also an important contributor to this decline. In past research, S&W gave indicators of the upgrading of black school quality. For example, in 1920, blacks attended school three-fourths of a year less than whites, and the average black teacher had 75 percent more pupils than a white counterpart. By 1954, both of these disparities had been greatly reduced.[3]

The Southern rural black migration to Northern cities, and the concomitant shift of black workers from sharecroppers to wage laborers, was the only major determinant of the wage decline. According to S&W, it accounted for 11 to 19 percent of the increase in the black–white male wage ratio between 1940 and 1980.

One of the factors S&W recognize only as having short-run and therefore minor effects on the black–white male wage is the advances that occurred in the agricultural economy of the South after 1940. The first effect of the technological revolution was to render black farm labor superfluous and reduce black incomes generally. But this decline in the demand for black labor became one of the driving forces behind the great migration. It also turned blacks into wage laborers by inducing them to end their dependence on low-wage Southern agriculture. This led, therefore, to an eventual increase in the black wage. Moreover, during the 1970's, the black average male wage in the South increased considerably and raised the black–white wage ratio at the national level by 4 to 10 percent.

Another factor assumed to have had a short term effect is the decline in the black male labor force participation rates since the mid 1960's. It is this factor that motivated Richard J. Butler and James J. Heckman to express serious reservations about using evidence such as declining black–white wage differences as support for the claim that blacks have made prodigious wage gains.[4] Butler and Heckman argued that what is more than likely being observed is the result of the significant reductions that have occurred in the labor force participation of low skill, low wage black male workers. This decline in relative numbers of low wage blacks in the labor market is the cause of the rise in black male average wages relative to those of whites.

In answer to Butler and Heckman, S&W adjusted their wage results in an attempt to control for the effects of the withdrawal of low wage blacks and reported that it made little difference for their initial results.

The most interesting of the supposed short-run factors investigated by S&W was the effects affirmative action had on the employment and wages of blacks during their study period. Their test for employment effects was aimed at determining whether affirmative action changed the distribution of black employment. By virtue of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, all private sector firms with 100 or more employees were required to report to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) on the state of their minority work force. Those with federal contracts worth $50,000 or more with 50 or more employees were monitored by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance. Thus, S&W hypothesized that "if affirmative action is effective and is adequately enforced, minority representation should expand more among firms that are 'covered' or required to report to the EEOC than among firms that are not." They also expected that changes would be greatest in managerial and professional occupations.

Their findings for the years between 1966 and 1980 indicate that "the employment picture has shifted from one where minority workers were less likely to be working for firms reporting to EEOC, to one where blacks are more likely than whites to work in these firms," and that "the vast majority of the increased employment in covered firms was dominated by firms that were federal contractors." They found that black males were 10 percent less likely to work in covered firms in 1966, but 25 percent more likely to work in such firms in 1980. Moreover, the

largest gains occurred in managerial and professional jobs. Blacks were only 50 percent as likely as whites to hold a managerial or professional job in a covered firm in 1966, but by 1980, they were equally likely as whites to hold such jobs.

Thus S&W's statistical evidence "strongly supports" the hypothesis that affirmative action has had important, positive employment effects for black males. They state, however, that the largest employment increases took place between 1966 and 1970, the four or five years immediately after the Civil Rights Act. After 1974, they claim there was virtually no change in the location of EEOC-covered black employment.

The results from their test for the effects of affirmative action on wages were not so unambiguous. They compared how much of the percentage of the wage gap was reduced prior to 1960 when there was no affirmative action with the amount that occurred after 1960 when there was. If affirmative action was effective in reducing the racial wage differential, then there should be a greater reduction observed in the post- then pre-1960 period.

Their evidence shows that black males with 1 to 10 years of work experience in all schooling classes experienced 3½ to 6 times greater increases in relative wages during the post-1960 period than in the pre-1960 period. For other experience–schooling classes, the results were mixed and, according to S&W, "the general pattern reveals that the racial wage gap narrowed as rapidly in the 20 year period up to 1960 as during the 20 years afterwards." Moreover, the principal gain in wages during the post-1960 period occurred from 1967 to 1972; and by 1975, wages had returned to the levels that would have prevailed in the absence of affirmative action. In addition, the increase in wages took place during the same period as the employment increases. During these years, so say S&W, the EEOC-covered firms greatly increased their demand for black labor and thereby bid up their wages. Once this quantity supplied had reached a new equilibrium level, wages returned to their long-run levels.

S&W concluded that, on sum, affirmative action had no significant long-run effect on the racial wage gap and that the rate of improvement in black wages after affirmative action was instituted was pretty much the same as it was prior to it. Secondly, they claim that affirmative action had a significant, but short-lived positive effect on the wages of younger black workers; however, the gains they made were only temporary, and by 1977 or so they had all but disappeared. Finally, they claim that the effects of affirmative action have been largely limited to the wages of young black college graduates.

There have been a number of critics of the Freeman–S&W optimism and most have centered on its narrow basis, i.e., black male wages. Unemployment, to which S&W give scant attention, is a major determinant of economic health and there has been no visible improvement in long-term relative black unemployment since the early 1970's. It has been maintained at over twice that of whites in all age groups and both sex categories during this period. Moreover, black teenage unemployment has been close to three times that of white teens since the late 1960's.

Family income, another important component of group economic well-being, is likewise omitted from the S&W black progress equation. Robert Hill, a sociologist, has shown that the convergence in individual incomes is not associated with a like convergence in family income.[5] The 1950 median black family had 54¢ for every $1 of white family income. This increased to 62¢ by 1975, but has steadily fallen since then to stand at 56¢ in 1983.

The poverty rate for blacks has been close to three times that of whites since 1959. For blacks the poverty rate at 58 percent in 1959 fell to a low of 30 percent in 1974. Since then it has risen and was 36 percent by 1983. The white rate was 18 percent in 1959, fell to a low of just over 8 percent in 1973, and rose to 12 percent in 1983. In addition, the poverty rates both for black children and the elderly are more than three times those of their white counterparts, and have been so all during the 1960's and 70's.

However, even if we agree that black male wages are one among several important indices of black economic progress, the measures of it chosen by S&W are problematic. William A. Darity, Jr., has pointed out in a critique of earlier work of the "optimists" that mean or median income or wage measures are calculated by the Census by excluding all those with zero or negative income in a given year.[6] A more acceptable measure would be per capita income. It is customarily used by economists in international comparisons. Darity corrected data similar to that used by S&W to account for those with zero or negative incomes by turning it into per capita measures. When he did this, any evidence that would have supported a claim of "dramatic" change in any period since 1950 disappeared. In the uncorrected data on mean income, the black–white income ratio stood at .53 in 1953, and rose steadily to .65 by 1977, an increase of 12 percentage points and one that might have sent S&W into paroxysms of delight. In the corrected data the ratio was .52 in 1953 and drifted up to just .59 by 1977, an increase of only 7 percentage points.

Thus, one is hard pressed to share S&W's sanguinity about black progress, founded as it is on so limited a conceptual and statistical base. And on the issue of whether such progress in black male wages has been spurred by affirmative action, S&W's own data seem to suggest that it has, despite the gloomy cast they put on it. They admit that there have been employment gains as a result of affirmative action, but hedge on whether there have been significant wage gains. As a matter of fact, the very groups among whom the wage gains would be expected, those with less than 10 years experience, exhibited gains 3½ to 6 times those reported for the pre-affirmative action periods. Moreover, despite the post-1972 decline the wage differences in 1979 were significantly less than they were in 1967, and S&W's claim that these were the levels to be expected in the absence of affirmative action is not convincing.

Still, in the main, S&W are forced to give credit, though grudgingly, to affirmative action as an important factor in the narrowing of the racial wage gap.

Whether or not education has a major impact on wage differentials is an ongoing controversial subject among

economists and other social scientists. Many analysts have found that equalizing black-white educational attainment would do little to decrease racial income inequality. S&W, however, appear to show that education and wage income are positively correlated. However the final verdict on this is not in.

There is little doubt though that the black South to North migration had an impact on black male wages and income. But as S&W admit, this was a one-shot deal and its effects are dissipating rapidly. In fact S&W claim that the improvement in the quality of black education was the result of the migration to better schools in the North. They are therefore somewhat pessimistic about any further advances in black school quality and end their study by prescribing a return to the economic growth rates in the general economy similar to those that prevailed in the 1960's as the mechanism for further reductions in black poverty.

The major mischief done by such upbeat accounts of black economic progress undergirded by a few selective measures is to give both the general public and those unfamiliar with the field a false impression that all is well and coming along nicely in the black community, and further that there is no real need for special efforts such as affirmative action to ensure that progress. This is a view many are all too happy to accept. See how quickly Albert Shanker embraces the notion.[7] Note also that the Shanker article says, "White-Black *Income* Gap Narrows" when it is really only the gap in black-white male *wages* that are measured in S&W.

The authors of *Closing the Gap* call the half-empty glass "half-full," with emphasis on the "full" and the "half" in sotto voce.

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Jeremiah P. Cotton, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Economics, and Research Associate at the William Monroe Trotter Institute, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

Reel Blacks

by

Patricia A. Turner

Everything is Not Satisfactual

An unaccompanied black adult female at a matinee performance of *Song of the South* is about as out of place as Big Bird at a cockfight. However, having encouraged the students in my course on black media images to see the film during its fortieth anniversary run, I felt obligated to reexamine it myself. So there I sat, surrounded by exuberant white pre-schoolers and their parents, watching as animation and live action seamlessly interchanged on the screen in Walt Disney's adaptation for Joel Chandler Harris' classic collection of Afro-American folktales.

A late nineteenth century journalist for the Atlanta Constitution, Harris, an amateur folklorist, set himself to the task of collecting and preserving the folk tales that

he had heard slaves tell during his childhood. Scholars who have investigated these tales now agree that Harris' collection represents the most significant compilation of genuine slave folklore available from the nineteenth century. African antecedents can be found for more than half of the tales. The chief protagonist in these tales is the trickster Brer Rabbit, who uses his wit, guile, and spunk to sabotage the efforts of ostensibly stronger animals in the forest.

In presenting these stories to his public, Harris embroidered the core tales with a frame story about a docile, aged slave who spends his evenings telling the tales to a young white boy. It is easy to understand why Harris felt the need to add this seemingly innocuous frame story. He was writing from the South in the aftermath of Reconstruction. He clearly needed to present the tales in a way that would be palatable to his white readers. Recasting the stories in the 1940s, Walt Disney was clearly also concerned about reactions of his white audience.

The Slaves' Stories

By focusing on the frame story, Harris and Disney perform a grave disservice to these tales and to Afro-Americans. During the era of slavery the trickster tales constituted the largest component of slave oral literature. They were not merely moral or entertainment stories for children but, instead, functional narratives for the adult slave population. In slave reminiscences collected by the Federal Writer's Project in the 1930s, countless elderly slaves recalled the days in which the Brer Rabbit stories were shared among the adult slaves when whites were far out of hearing range. While adult slaves may have occasionally shared the tales with a white youngster, such a tale telling situation was the exception and not the rule. With his quick wit and unrelenting verve, Brer Rabbit was the perfect hero for a people who had to rely on verbal facility rather than physical strength in order to exercise any control over their day-to-day lives. In the world the slaves made, Brer Rabbit exemplified the most successful slave, the one who could minimize his work load, maximize his food intake and all the while escape punishment. Brer Fox or any other enemy in the forest symbolized the masters and overseers who were so persistent in their attempts to harness the wily rabbit.

Disney's 20th century recreation of Harris's frame story is much more heinous than the original. The days on the plantation located in "the United States of Georgia," begin and end with unsupervised blacks singing songs about their wonderful home as they march to and from the fields. Disney made no attempt to render the music in the style of the spirituals and folk songs that would have been sung during this era. No indication is made about the status of the blacks on this plantation. Joel Chandler Harris set his stories in the post-slavery era, but Disney's version seems to take place during a mythical time when blacks lived in slave quarters on a plantation, worked diligently for no visible reward, and considered Atlanta a viable place to set out for.

Kind old Uncle Remus caters to the needs of the young white boy whose father has inexplicably left him and his mother at the plantation. An obviously ill-kept black child of the same age named Toby is assigned to look after the white boy, Johnny. Although he makes one reference to his 'ma,' Toby's parents are nowhere to be seen. The black adults in the film pay attention to him only when he neglects his responsibilities as Johnny's playmate–keeper. He is up before Johnny in the morning in order to bring his white charge water to wash with and to keep him entertained.

The boys befriend a little blond white girl, Jenny, whose family is clearly meant to represent the "white trash" of the neighborhood. Although Johnny coaxes his mother into inviting Jenny to his fancy birthday party at the big house, the black Toby is curiously absent from scenes surrounding the party. Toby is good enough to catch frogs with, but not good enough to have birthday cake with. When Toby and Johnny are with Uncle Remus, the gray-haired black man directs most of his attention to the white child. When Johnny's mother threatens to keep her son away from the old gentleman's cabin, Uncle Remus is so hurt that he starts to run away. Thus blacks on the plantation are seen as willingly subservient to the whites to the extent that the needs of their own children are overlooked. In the world that Disney made, the blacks sublimate their own lives in order to be better servants to the white family. If he had truly understood the message of the tales he animated so delightfully, he would have realized how distorted the frame story is.

False History Lesson

Even following its 1946 release, *Song of the South* sparked controversy. Each time it has been re-released the same debate begins again. Critics sympathetic with the views of black Americans bemoan the fact that yet another generation of white youngsters are being subjected to a patently false history lesson. On the other hand, Disney fans applaud the film for its technological excellence. Black film scholars are accustomed to this argument; it is the same one that is dragged out whenever *Birth of a Nation* or other racist films are revived.

This year many critics have rationalized their enthusiasm for the re-release of *Song of the South* by citing it as one of the few children's films available. Certainly I agree that good children's films are few and far between. Nonetheless *Song of the South* projects an erroneous and perhaps dangerous view of one of the most complex eras of American history. If studios are unwilling to permanently shelve it as they promised to do in the 1970s, perhaps they would consider editing the frame story out and leaving the fully animated sequences in tact. They could replace the narrative with newly animated versions of other tales from the Harris collection. The cartoons are not offensive, but the frame story is not satisfactual.

Patricia A. Turner, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Black Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. She is a specialist in African American Folklore. An earlier version of this article appeared in the Boston Globe.

Overview

The William Monroe Trotter Institute is a research unit in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. The Trotter Institute, which originated in 1984, sponsors research, lectures and programs on the black experience. To accomplish its aims, the Institute has five programs:

(1) The Distinguished Lecture Series,
(2) The Institute Forums,
(3) The Resident Fellows Program,
(4) The Research Associates Program, and
(5) The Publication Program.

1. The Distinguished Lecture Series

This series of lectures are presented by well-known scholars and public figures. The series reflects the interests as well as the curriculum and research needs of the Black Studies Department and, when feasible, is designed around a theme that is selected yearly. During the 1985–86 academic year this lecture series addressed the issue of affirmative action. Each of six nationally known scholars and public figures presented a lecture on issues in affirmative action.

2. Institute Forums

A major activity of the Institute is its Forum series, which includes research presentations, public policy presentations/panels, community-oriented forums and other scholarly presentations. The Forums are a principal means by which the Institute disseminates the results of its research and by which it fosters interactions with the community on public policy and community issues.

The research seminars are one of the means by which Institute Fellows and Associates present the results of their work. In addition, area scholars who are conducting research in an area of concern to the Institute are invited to present at the Forums.

Occasionally, Institute Forums arrange individual and panel discussions on current public policy issues. Similarly, current community issues are presented or debated in the Forums by community-based individuals and officials of public agencies as well as university professors.

3. Resident Fellows Program

Each year the Institute selects one or more Fellows for one-year appointments. While pursuing their research programs these Fellows are in residence at UMass/Boston during the length of their appointment; and they participate generally in the activities of the Institute. There are two types of fellowships: (1) Research Fellows, and (2) Post-doctoral Fellows.

(a) *Research Fellows*—More advanced scholars, or individuals established in other fields, i.e., public service

(b) *Post-Doctoral Fellows*—Relatively new Ph.D's.

Applicants to the Fellowship Program may have the option of proposing research projects which focus on research questions announced by the Institute or proposing research in other areas. Research plans for these awards may take several forms, including collaborative research with other scholars at the Institute and individual research based on the scholar's research interest.

Ordinarily, each Resident Fellow award is made for one year. However, under special circumstances of particular research projects, awards may be made for one semester, or up to two years. When feasible, each Fellow teaches one course in Black Studies during the one-year residence.

4. The Research Associates Program

Since research is the primary function of the William Monroe Trotter Institute, the Research Associates program is an integral component. Research Associates are scholars who conduct research on Black Studies related topics at the Institute, produce research reports and other scholarly papers, and participate in Institute Forums and other programs. Scholars are first appointed as Research Associates and then provided support for their research.

Opportunities exist for scholars to conduct research, on their own, in collaboration with other scholars, or as part of some larger Institute study. One of the implicit purposes of the Trotter Institute is to provide structures that promote scholarly interaction and collaboration between and among professionals from various disciplines on matters of concern to the black community. The weekly Institute forums, in conjunction with the Research Associates program, provide a means of accomplishing these aims. The forums offer a wide range of issues and topics, many dealing with critical public issues which can benefit from multidisciplinary approaches. Research Associates at the Trotter Institute represent a variety of disciplines and address various topics related to the black experience.

Some selected topics of Institute research projects are listed below:

Economics

Jobs, Income and Poverty
Youth Employment and Unemployment
Turnover and Duration of Unemployment
Boston's Southwest Corridor Development
Free Enterprise Zones
Underemployment
Race Relations in Organized Labor

History

Antebellum Slave Narratives
Free Blacks in Philadelphia in the Early 19th Century
Blacks in Rhode Island in the 18th Century
Documentary of Blacks in the Civil War
Marcus Garvey as Sociological Critique

Community

Black Service Institutions
Demographic Trends
Political Trends
Community Development
Black Artists and Their Work: Context and Content

Housing

Housing, Neighborhood, and Development
Community-Based and Tenant-Owned Housing

Education

Desegregation and Quality Education
Student Activism in the Public Schools

Africa

Women's Rights
Prenatal Care
Colonial African Labor Policy-Making

Women

Black Women in the Labor Force
Black Women Policy Makers

Family

Black Families in Boston: Demographic Trends and Policy Implications
Changing Role of the Extended Family on the Black Elderly

Criminal Justice

Mandatory Work Versus Mandatory Sentencing
Alternative Sentencing

Communications

Black Image in Boston Media
Access to Cable Television

Psychology

Black Personality Development

5. Publications

The Institute makes the results of its research and news of its other activities available to the public in the following publications:

- Monographs
- Research Reports
- Occasional Papers
- Periodical

Institute Monographs are full scale research monographs produced on an occasional basis. The volume, *The Emerging Black Community in Boston*, a set of eight studies on blacks in Boston, is the first of these monographs.

Research Reports and *Occasional Papers* are the principal means by which Institute research findings are disseminated. Research reports are issued upon the completion of each research project. In the *Occasional Papers* series, copies of papers of general interest, i.e., short theoretical papers, papers presented at conferences, and preliminary research reports are made available.

Four times a year the *Trotter Institute Review* is produced to report on the activities of the Institute and to present articles, summaries of research reports, and essays on issues in Black Studies.

Staffing

In addition to the Director, permanent staff members of the Institute include three clerical and administrative staff and two professional staff persons. Also, in 1986–87 there are some fourteen (14) scholars attached to the Institute as Research Associates. These Research Associates, who are faculty members at area universities, as well as the University of Massachuestts at Boston, are actively engaged in research projects at the Trotter Institute.

Position Available

Caribbean Literature

The Department of Black Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Boston invites applications for a tenure-track assistant professor position in Caribbean Literature beginning in September, 1987. Ph.D. is required; specialty in Caribbean Literature. Additional expertise in African Literature is highly desirable. Salary is competitive. Send letter of application, vita, and names and addresses of three or more references by March 24, 1987, to Robert Moore, Recruiting Chair, Department of Black Studies, University of Massachusetts at Boston, Boston, MA 02125.

THE WILLIAM MONROE TROTTER INSTITUTE
University of Massachusetts at Boston
announces

POST-DOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS
1987–88 Academic Year

The William Monroe Trotter Institute at the University of Massachusetts at Boston is planning to award two post-doctoral fellowships for the 1987–88 academic year.

The Trotter Institute sponsors research and service activities related to the black community. These include research projects on social policy issues of interest to the black community, as well as research projects of an academic character designed to improve our understanding of the history, culture, and social development of the black community. The Institute also conducts and sponsors symposia, lectures, exhibits and other activities.

One fellowship will be awarded in the humanities; the other will be awarded in the social and behavioral sciences. The proposed project in the social and behavioral sciences must address a current social policy issue concerning the black community.

ELIGIBILITY: Applicants must have completed all doctoral work by April 15, 1987.

TERMS: The stipend is $20,000 to $25,000 for the academic year, based upon the number of post-PhD years of experience. There is also a $2,000 cost of research allowance. Fellows will be in full-time residence during the entire academic year, during which time they will be expected to complete a project. Each fellow will teach one course in the Black Studies Department during the academic year, and participate in the activities of the Institute. Opportunities will exist for collaborative interactions with other scholars.

APPLICATION: Application materials, which must be submitted and postmarked by March 30, 1987, may be obtained from the address below:

Fellowship Program
William Monroe Trotter Institute
University of Massachusetts at Boston
Harbor Campus
Boston, Massachusetts 02125

NOTIFICATION: Candidates will be notified of the Selection Committee's decision by May 1, 1987.

William Monroe Trotter Institute
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